

Men's College Basketball

Unfinished: UNC, Oregon try to get it right this time

By EDDIE PELLIS
Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Roy Williams could hear his own footsteps as he padded through the near-silent locker room, still trying to wrap his mind around a question that couldn't be answered: What do you say to a group of players who did nothing wrong, but lost anyway?

In some form or other, that question has lingered at North Carolina all season. With a win over Oregon in the Final Four on Saturday, the Tar Heels (31-7) will be back to the title game, where, last year, Villanova unraveled their dreams with one dagger of a shot — a game-winning 3 with the buzzer sounding.

"The most inadequate feeling I've ever had in my life," Williams called the aftermath of the game. "What I did is, I tried to tell them, let's focus on using this feeling as fuel, as motivation, to work extremely hard in the offseason."

Most of the key players from last year's Tar Heels — among them, Joel Berry II, Isaiah Hicks and Justin Jackson — are back. They have a group-texting channel named, simply, "Redemption."

The North Carolina players have walked the fine line this season between the natural inclination to dwell on the painful loss, and the impossible task of forgetting it.

"A dream was to get here," Jackson said. "It wasn't necessarily



In this March 26, 2016, file photo, members of the Oregon team walk off the court at half time in an NCAA college basketball game against Oklahoma in the regional finals of the NCAA Tournament in Anaheim, Calif.

AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill, File

to get back here and get back what we thought we won last year."

Oregon (33-5) had title dreams last year, too.

The Ducks were a No. 1 seed, but in an NCAA Tournament that veered off the rails, guard Dillon Brooks got upbraided by the losing coach in the Sweet 16, Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, who lectured him in the handshake line for jacking up (and making) an uncontested 3 while the teams were running out the clock. Then, the top-seeded Ducks ran into Buddy Hield in the Elite Eight.

They looked primed for another run this season, then big man Chris

Boucher went down with a torn-up knee in the Pac-12 tournament, and thoughts of Oregon repeating as a 1 seed went out the window.

Instead, the Ducks were seeded third and largely overlooked coming into this year's tournament. But now, they're two wins away from the team's second championship. The first came in 1939, the first year of the tournament.

"It was stunning when we found out that day that Chris was not going to be with us," Ducks coach Dana Altman said. "We just had each of our guys step up and try to do a little more."

Some things to watch when the Ducks meet the Tar Heels in Saturday night's semifinal:

MAYE DAY: Could sophomore Luke Maye be North Carolina's new go-to guy? Maye hit the game-winner with 0.3 seconds left against Kentucky in the regional final last weekend. It marked the first time a North Carolina player made a game-winning shot in the last 10 seconds of an NCAA Tournament game since 1990 (Rick Fox vs. Oklahoma). That game-winner came two days after Maye had 16 points and 12 rebounds — his first career double-double — in a win

over Butler.

HOT SHOT: Oregon's Tyler Dorsey is shooting 65 percent (17 for 26) from 3-point range in the tournament. He said teams haven't been stepping out to challenge his shot as much in the tournament, and that's even more the case as he's extended his range over the last few weeks. The key to keeping a hot hand? "Nothing to figure out, really," he said. "I'm just getting a lot of shots. I'm probably getting more than anyone, and I've got the hot hand."

REBOUNDING: One reason the Tar Heels are here: Rebounding. They average 13 more rebounds a game than their opponents, a margin unseen in Division I since Michigan State made the Final Four in 2001. It's resulting in 17.5 second-chance points a game, more than eight more than their opponents. Ducks coach Dana Altman said limiting North Carolina's advantage will be a "priority for everyone who is on the floor," but one made more difficult by the absence of Boucher, the team's second-leading rebounder.

BERRY: Berry has been battling two sprained ankles, the last of which was suffered in the Kentucky game. On Friday, he participated in North Carolina's closed practice and said he's feeling about 85 percent — a virtually certain sign that he'll play. "I think I'll be effective," he said. "It's a matter of just getting into the game and not worrying about it. Once I do that, it will be good."

South Carolina and Gonzaga on the defensive in Final Four

By JIM O'CONNELL
Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — South Carolina and Gonzaga have a lot more in common than just being in their first Final Four.

Experience has been a key word around the two programs this week in advance of their national semifinal game on Saturday.

A bigger word that applies is defense. They don't play the same style but they both are effective in holding down an opponent.

Guard Duane Notice is the defensive focal point for seventh-seeded South Carolina.

"Just as your point guard initiates your offense, your on-ball defender initiates your defense," Gamecocks coach Frank Martin said Friday. "When your point guard's good offensively, your team is good offensively. When your on-ball guard is good defensively, your team is good defensively. They go hand in hand."

The man top-seeded Gonzaga (36-1) relies on to



• Today, 3:09 p.m. (CBS)
• at Glendale, Arizona

lead its defense is 7-foot-1 center Przemek Karnowski.

"The rim protection that we have this year is different than anything we've been able to put out there," Bulldogs coach Mark Few said. "We got the bulk, the strength, size of Karnowski which allows us to not have to double-team. So then we're not forced into rotations. But then we also can combine that with the athleticism, the shot-blocking of Zach Collins and Killian Tillie helps."

Ask the Gamecocks (26-10) about Gonzaga's defense and rim protection is mentioned again and again.

"Their bigs are huge," South Carolina's Sindarius Thornwell said. "They rebound well and we are big on offensive rebounding. We are big on attacking the rim.



Gonzaga's Przemek Karnowski shoots over Josh Perkins during a practice session for their NCAA Final Four tournament college basketball semifinal game Friday, March 31, 2017, in Glendale, Ariz.

AP Photo David J. Phillip

They do a great job keeping you out of the rim and make you take pull-up jumpers. We must do a good job moving their defense so we can get easier shots."

Freshman Maik Kotsar

will have the main responsibility of handling Karnowski.

"They have huge bodies and they are tall," the 6-10 Kotsar said. "Just the physicality of it, we have to guard and not let them get easy

paint touches."

Gonzaga, which has allowed 60.9 points per game, has kept three of its four opponents under 60 points in the NCAA Tournament, while South Carolina's scrambling zone has kept its opponents off balance and out of sync. The Gamecocks allow 64.9 points per game.

"We have been working on it all week, just trying to find ways to exploit their defense," Gonzaga's Johnathan Williams said. "I feel like we'll be fine. We just need to follow the game."

EXPERIENCE MATTERS: Before this tournament, South Carolina's last NCAA win was in 1973. Gonzaga has been one of the tournament's mainstays winning 21 games in the 18 consecutive years the Zags have reached the NCAA under Few.

"I've always felt that experience helps to get back. Experience doesn't help the game you're playing," Martin said. "The game you're playing is a game. And how you manage your-

self day to day to day allows you to be prepared to succeed when the game starts."

FEELING GOOD: Thornwell, the Southeastern Conference player of the year, missed Thursday's practice when he wasn't feeling well. He practiced Friday and sounded good to go.

"I had a headache, fever and stuff like that. I am fine now. Everything is going good," he said Friday. "We were glad it occurred on Wednesday so I could get it over with. Everything worked out and I am glad to be here with my teammates."

FOCAL POINT: The distractions of the Final Four are everywhere for the players, from media commitments to fans being there every time they turn around.

"That is what you are always worried about. People come up to you when you're on top," Gonzaga's Josh Perkins said. "That's just what it is. You have to focus on the right things and stay focused. I am glad my dad and the people around me keep my head in the game."

BELL: Scoring up in March

Continued from 1B
fingers with God in the Sistine Chapel.

The photo was from Oregon's Elite Eight win over Kansas, a game in which Bell blocked eight shots to send the Ducks to the Final Four for the first time since 1939.

Bell has embraced the account in his name and his now-bigger role for Oregon.

The Ducks seemed to have their Final Four bid derailed in the semifinals of the Pac-12 Tournament, when senior forward Chris Boucher went down with a torn left ACL. The Ducks led the nation in blocked shots during the regular season and Boucher led them — along with the Pac-12 — so it seemed like a drop-off was coming.

Instead, Oregon made a few tweaks, leaned on Bell inside a little more and kept winning.

Always an intimidating force, the 6-foot-9, 225-pound junior has asserted himself even more while finding a way to avoid fouls. The Ducks need his presence at the rim, but also can't afford to have him in foul trouble now that Boucher is out and he has done both well.

"He's risen to the occasion," Oregon coach Dana Altman said. "I think he knew when Chris went down that there was going to be more pressure on him to perform. And fortunately for us, he's handled that pressure very well."

A top recruit out of Long Beach, California, as a high school player, Bell had an immediate impact on the

Ducks. He arrived in Eugene swatting shots, finishing first in the Pac-12 with 2.69 per game while shooting 59 percent from the floor.

Bell became Oregon's career leader in blocked shots — 147 at the time — as a sophomore in his 50th career game and blocked 84 more this season. Heading into Saturday's Final Four game against North Carolina, Bell leads Oregon with 8.6 rebounds per game, is its fourth-leading scorer at 10.9 points and is shooting 63 percent from the floor.

Bell has been at his best when the Ducks have needed him the most, picking up his play even more in the NCAA Tournament.

He has upped his scoring average to 12.5 points and his rebounding to 12.5 while becoming the first players since Houston's Hakeem Olajuwon in 1983-84 to grab at least 12 rebounds in five straight NCAA Tournament games (spanning two seasons).

"I think I'm just probably playing harder knowing that I have to do more and knowing the stage we're on and it's win or go home," he said. "I don't think I've been playing different, I think I've just been doing my role better."

Bell's stronger role also has a nice sidelight; it allows him to block nuclear weapons, the Hindenburg, LaVar Ball (the mouthy father of UCLA's Lonzo Ball), and even Janet Jackson's wardrobe malfunction at the Super Bowl.

Oh, the things Jordan can block.

BMCC: Bonner slugs two home runs, drives in six

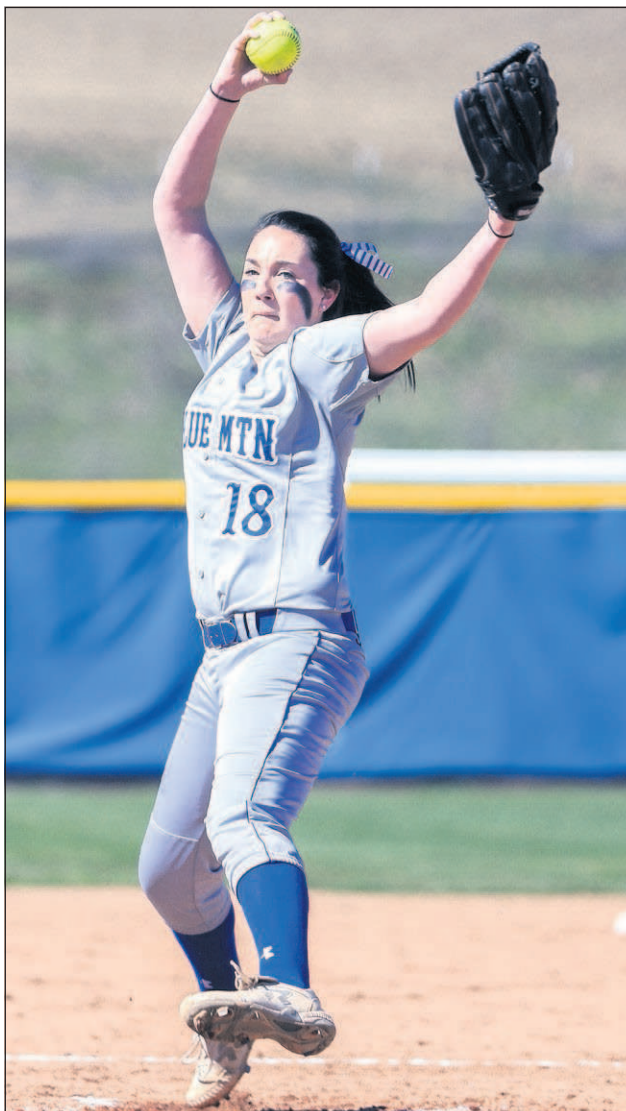
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in practice with the pitchers is to just move on to the next pitch and she did that and did a great job today."

Bonner backed up her pitcher with not only her support on the field, but her performance on offense as well. From her leadoff spot in the lineup, Bonner went 2 for 4 with a pair of three-run home runs in the second and third innings to contribute half of the team's runs herself. It gives her the team lead with seven home runs on the season, and now has six home runs and 20 RBIs in eight league games.

"I was just looking for my pitch ... that up-and-in pitch to drive there and I just took it," she said. "The first one I knew (it was gone) the instant I hit it but the second one not so much ... I was little nervous and didn't quiet get the whole bat on it but it traveled out."

In Game 2, Yakima Valley again struck for two runs in the first inning with a home run from Kathy Cousins off of Timberwolf pitcher Tiffany Snyder. In the bottom of the inning, Bonner started the Timberwolves off by just missing her third home run of the day as she crushed a double that caromed off the left field fence, though she was left stranded in the inning.

After that at-bat, the Timberwolves had a tough time figuring out Yakima Valley pitcher Sammie Cooper, as she continuously fooled the Timberwolves with her rise ball and changeup. Cooper finished with



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

BMCC's Megan Ulrey winds up for a pitch during Friday's home game against Yakima Valley College.

nine strikeouts in the game and just six hits allowed.

"We practiced yesterday for her combination because it takes a lot of discipline as a hitter to lay off of those," Richards said. "And today it took four, five innings until we were finally able to get

into our rhythm and make the pitcher throw more pitches. We've just got to get there sooner."

BMCC finally broke its goose egg on the scoreboard with a solo home run off the bat of Lauryn Cagle in the bottom of the sixth

and then two batters later, Ulrey ripped an RBI single into left field to make it a 6-2 game. In the seventh, BMCC loaded the bases on three walks and Cagle hit into a sacrifice fly for the third run and then Sydney Saxton Siaki followed up with a two-RBI single into right field for the final runs of the game.

Siaki led the Timberwolves with four combined hits on the day with two runs scored and two RBI, while Cagle and Ulrey each had two hits apiece. Overall, the top 5 batters of Blue Mountain's lineup went 12 for 30 on the day with 10 runs scored and 12 RBI while the bottom four went just 1 for 15.

"Our top five in the lineup are seriously strong hitters and most of our games we typically score with those fist five kids," Richards said. "The bottom of the lineup can get going and turn it on a little more ... Brooke Kralman's been getting herself on base or finding a way to turn the lineup over."

"But again, consistency has been the key issue.

Game 1	YVCC	200	01	-	R	H	E
BMCC	075	0X	-	12	6	3	

Game 2	YVCC	201021	3	-	R	H	E
BMCC	000002	3	-	9	17	0	

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