

Scary end, but the beat goes on for UNC

By Dana O'Neil
ESPN.com

NEW YORK -- The three men clearly had come to Madison Square Garden straight from some high-powered business jobs.

Dressed in their well-tailored suits and their power ties, they took their high-priced seats directly behind the bench ... and proceeded to heckle Roy Williams and his North Carolina players mercilessly for two hours.

They never ditched their perfectly pressed jackets, never loosened their perfectly knotted ties, yet proceeded to stand up, point, curse and then high-five their efforts with an angry zest that the heartiest face-painted fan would admire.

Their angst is understandable. While the rest of the world goes to hell in a handbasket -- Wall Street rebuilds thanks to skyrocketing hand-sanitizer stocks -- Carolina just keeps on keeping on. Nothing amiss in the world of powder blue, not so much as a hiccup for a team that lost four-fifths of the starting lineup from its national championship team.

It's downright maddening. Where's the stumble from too many guys leaving early for the NBA draft? Where's the down year as young role players mature into star roles?

Not here.

Future lottery pick [Ed Davis](#) gets in foul trouble? No problem. Williams will pluck future lottery pick [John Henson](#) off the bench. What, 6-10 [Deon Thompson](#) needs a breather? Alrighty, let's see, will Williams go with 6-10 twins [Travis](#) and [David Wear](#) or 7-foot [Tyler Zeller](#)?

Oh, the inhumanity of it all.

Never was the largesse of wealth that has become North Carolina basketball more evident than on Thursday night. In the Tar Heels' first meaningful game of the season, they toppled 15th-ranked Ohio State 77-73, and the final score doesn't come close to reflecting UNC's control on the game.

Eliminate a furious rally in the final two minutes and the Buckeyes go down by double digits.

"I don't think we're rebuilding," Thompson said. "We had a good core group. We just reloaded the bullets that we lost."



Deon Thompson posted a double-double (15 points, 12 rebounds) as UNC marched to yet another win.

And the bullets aren't even firing in sync yet. After beating Ohio State, there still remains plenty for Williams to nitpick.

The Heels committed 19 turnovers, including a frenzy of poor choices in those final hectic minutes that let the Buckeyes make things dicey; they got beat on the offensive boards 15-10 by a much smaller Ohio State team; oh, and they are still trying to grow a point guard. [Larry Drew II](#) dished out eight assists but also was responsible for four of those turnovers.

Rebuilding is a dirty word on Tobacco Road. Williams is loathe to use it, arguing that if he does, it will give his players a cop-out.

Really, who would buy it anyway? Forget what Carolina lost. Here's what the Tar Heels have to tinker with: six McDonald's All-Americans and three other guys who were merely state players of the year. Against Ohio State, Williams went 11 deep.

(And in the Dubai version of the rich get richer, the Heels also recently secured a commitment from [Harrison Barnes](#), the No. 1 high school player in the country).

"When you say you're going to have your ups and downs, then you have them," Williams said. "It's not to say there aren't questions and places we need to improve. We do, but we also have the potential to be a very good team."

As in scary good. Again. Still.

After a less-than-stellar effort against Valparaiso on Sunday, Williams challenged his team to play better against an Ohio State squad that looked to be among the best in a strong Big 10.

He saved much of his ire for senior [Marcus Ginyard](#),

Ginyard had a no-show five-point, zero-rebound effort against Valpo, a night Williams jokingly called a "Wanda," implying Ginyard played about as well as the coach's wife.

"That probably scared the dickens out of everyone else," Williams said. "Marcus is one of my pets."

Ginyard still put up a Wanda on the boards against OSU, securing but one rebound. But he earned his coach's praise everywhere else. He scored 13 points and most important, spent the night harassing the bejesus out of All-American candidate [Evan Turner](#).

The high-scoring phenom still came up with a triple-double, but not the sort he wants to remember: 23 points, 11 rebounds and 10 turnovers.

That the Buckeyes even made it a game is a credit to how good they, too, might be.

For 38 minutes, Ohio State appeared to be following Michigan State down the Big Ten's path of Tar Heels destruction. Forced to the perimeter because of Carolina's forest of big men, they clanged 1-of-10 from behind the arc in the first half, falling behind 14 at the break.



Evan Turner was befuddled for much of the night by Marcus Ginyard and the UNC defense.

And then, inexplicably, the Buckeyes started making every circus shot they threw up. In the final 2:20, they drained four 3-pointers and, with Drew simultaneously going 2-for-6 at the line, a would-be rout got insanely close.

"Obviously, we made a great comeback," Ohio State coach Thad Matta said. "I think you have to give [the Heels'] defense a little bit of credit. Their size, their length, their quickness, their speed ... I watched the Valparaiso game and I had a sneaking suspicion they were going to come out and play some great defense, and that's exactly what happened."

When it was over, Williams lamented that at times his team would have to win ugly.

To the veteran coach, who loves nothing more than a game that finishes between the 90- and 100-point plateau, this probably wasn't a thing of beauty.

To most everyone else, it looked pretty darned good.

Except for maybe those three guys in the suits.

Dana O'Neil covers college basketball for ESPN.com and can be reached at espsoneil@live.com.

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