

Heels lack firepower to topple Orange

North Carolina loses its first game of the season but must regroup fast because 3 of its next 6 opponents are ranked in the AP's top 25.

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NEW YORK - NEW YORK — The chants of “over-rated!” began with about three minutes left Friday night at Madison Square Garden. Frankly, they could have begun a whole lot sooner.

Sixth-ranked North Carolina could barely bury a second-half shot, struggled to make second-half stops, and looked exactly like what it is in losing to Syracuse 87-71 in the championship game of the 2K Sports Classic: a team with a lot of talented parts still trying to piece them together into a cohesive, intense, consistent unit.

“They’re not the national championship team,” Orange coach Jim Boeheim reminded everyone (twice) after Syracuse shot 54.4 percent for the game, while using its zone to help force 19 turnovers and hold Carolina to 38.1 percent.

No one will likely forget that factoid after Friday.

“We got our tails beat by a very good basketball team,” UNC coach Roy Williams said. “The second half is about as bad as you can play – we hope.”

Carolina (4-1) led 39-37 at halftime. But Syracuse (4-0) opened the second half with a blistering 22-1 run that gave it a 59-40 lead. It was an ugly snowball affect: a Tar Heel would throw up an airball; Syracuse would score. A Tar Heel would turn it over, Syracuse would score, again. In all, UNC missed its first 13 shots of the half and turned it over five times before forward Tyler Zeller buried his team's first field goal, a short jumper with 12:02 left.

“They just came out a lot more focused, a lot more intense,” said senior Marcus Ginyard, who bruised his side in a second-half collision. “We were playing, coach was saying, ‘cautious,’ and we just came out not really attacking them, and they got us back on our heels. And we were taking advantage of every opportunity that we gave them.”

Ginyard – who frankly isn’t used to losing much – tried to lead a comeback.

After Syracuse' Kris Joseph gave his team it's biggest advantage of the game, 62-42, on a 3-pointer, the Tar Heels countered with a 18-6 run – including six points by Ginyard and four from freshman Travis Wear. David Wear's 3-pointer cut Syracuse's lead to 68-60 with 7:02 left.

But it didn't last, not with UNC senior Deon Thompson posting only a quiet 11 points, sophomore Ed Davis scoring only three of his team-leading 16 points after halftime, and the Tar Heels – whose strength is supposed to be its big guys -- getting outscored 46-28 in the paint.

Not with forward Wesley Johnson leading the Orange with 25 points and eight rebounds; guard Andy Rautins – defended mostly by Ginyard – finishing with 11 points, 7 assists, 7 steals and 7 rebounds; and Syracuse scoring 23 points off turnovers.

“Their shots were going in and ours were not,” Williams said. “We turned it over. We got frustrated. Don't say it is ‘too young’ of a team, we are basketball players. We have to play.”

And re-group.

And soon.

Three of UNC's next six games are against top-25 teams. After Friday's loss, the Tar Heels may drop out of the top 10 – but if they don't improve, they'll be subject to that “over-rated!” chant, again.