Ford a Thorn In Michigan's Side

By Dan CALLAHAN
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It's been going on for years. North Carolina. When things get tight you go to the four corners. That's exactly what the Tar Heels did once again Saturday night at the Civic Center in Raleigh. They had been held in check in the first half by the defensive efforts of Virginia Tech prevailing in the final seconds, 81-77.

As usual the thorn in the side of the enemy was Carolina's great Phil Ford. Ford's four free throws with only two seconds remaining to finally decide the issue. Tech had pulled within two points, 79-77 with 44 seconds left and remarkably waited until only four seconds remained to get the free throws.

Ford was pleased with his overall play, especially in the four corners. "I thought the four corners worked well. It's the best I've operated, the four corners, I played up a bunch in a pressure situation. We've been under these conditions many times. I guess the cream just came to the top."

Was he nervous while shooting those final free throws after missing action for the same reason that enabled Tech to close the gap?

"I was upset with myself for missing those two earlier free throws. I take a lot of pride in my free throw shooting. When it gets close like tonight all I can say is I feel men now. That's when I like to go to the line the most."

One glaring problem for Carolina on this night was Tech's complete control of the backboards. The Hokies had a 46-27 advantage in the game and 25-12 at the half. This statistic concerned Tar Heel head coach Dean Smith. "I don't know what to do, but the rebounding concerns me. We've been soaveraged in the past couple of games I don't think we'll suffer too much from that."

Smith, who had been out of shape and out of the game for the last eight minutes, was limited to two minutes remaining. Forward Walter Davis set out of much of the game with a shoulder problem and he too fouled out with over two minutes remaining.

Smith had played the whole game, Smith remarked, "I'd like to comment on that, but I won't."

Lagarde finished with four points on the night as did prize freshman Mike O'Koren, and Lagarde, who played on this year's Olympic team, didn't think much of it. "We're just not rebounding well. O'Koren will get better with experience, but we've got to do it together."

Lagarde added, "I feel I got help from Tech for some of our problems. Wansley boxed out well. Thorpe was awfully tough. My wrist has been hurt too, but the main reason I didn't get my points was I couldn't get into proper position. I just couldn't get free to take the shots I normally do."

While Smith as Lagarde was concerned with his lack of productivity in the front court, Smith was greatly pleased with his famed four corners offense.

"I went into it a little earlier than I'd planned, but I just don't like to play without Lagarde and Davis. Their boards were shooting well and it was the thing to do. We didn't stretch out the lead, but we scored all but one time down the floor in the four corners. Tech did too, but that's fine. I didn't really mind the Headings points," admitted Smith.

Smith thought that forward Walter Davis played a great game, but Davis didn't seem to feel as strongly about it. "I thought we had a chance to do tonight, and you can't be upset about a team as good as Tech. They just kept coming. We knew we had to keep them down when we got in front by a few points, but they just wouldn't stay down. I think we played a little better, but I don't think Davis played as well as I played. That's taken a lot of our time. We started out great, but then we just died."

It was the little problems that led the Heels to victory on this night, as Davis finished with 24, Davis 17, and John Kuester 14.

They were dominated on the boards in this very physical affair and their young players weren't all that productive, but as they listened to the popular hit tune in the dressing room "Diaco Duck" you got the impression that things weren't all that bad."