

# DEVILS GET THEIR DUE



## Duke fans celebrate champs' homecoming

By Bob Sutton  
Burlington Times-News

**DURHAM** — The triumphant return home of the Duke men's basketball team Tuesday afternoon as national champion caused another party atmosphere inside Cameron Indoor Stadium.

"We won the national championship," coach Mike Krzyzewski said, shaking his head almost in disbelief some 14½ hours after it became reality.

While much of the unlikely storyline for the Blue Devils' championship comes from postseason struggles early in the careers of this senior class, forward Lance Thomas recalled something more recent involving classmate Jon Scheyer.

"I remember on Senior Night when Jon said the best is yet to come," Thomas said.

### ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

- Kyle Singler, Duke
- Nolan Smith, Duke
- Jon Scheyer, Duke
- Shelvin Mack, Butler
- Gordon Hayward, Butler

"That moment is here."

The victory celebration nearly filled Duke's home arena, with an estimated 9,000 fans pouring in and outpouring their love for a team that was never ranked No. 1 during the season but always will be remembered as champions.

"That's what I came to Duke to do," junior guard Nolan Smith said.

Travel delays from Indianapolis caused the Blue Devils to arrive about an hour later than scheduled. That didn't

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AP photos

Duke's Brian Zoubek, right, Jon Scheyer and the team mascot celebrate a 61-59 win over Butler in the NCAA championship game Monday. Above, coach Mike Krzyzewski and the team stand before a home crowd at Cameron Indoor Stadium on Tuesday.

## Coach K challenged Butler 'miracle'

**INDIANAPOLIS** — Of all the brilliant coaching decisions Mike Krzyzewski has made throughout 30 seasons and 1,015 games at Duke, this one will always be debatable.

The Blue Devils led Butler 61-59 with 3.6 seconds left in Monday night's national championship game and senior Brian Zoubek had one more free throw. Yet in the excitement and chaos of the most important moment of the season, Krzyzewski ordered Zoubek to miss.

It was a peculiar instruction. Yet Zoubek didn't bother questioning the strategy either.

"He knows a lot more than me," the Devils center said. "I guess it was just kind of blind faith."

But shouldn't Coach K have known better? Hadn't



**Dan Wiederer**

he seen that January game in Raleigh when N.C. State guard Farnold Degand, in a similar situation with the exact same score, missed his second free throw and the Wolfpack lost when Florida's Chandler Parsons bombed in a 75-footer at the buzzer for a 62-61 Gators win?

Didn't Krzyzewski know the fairy tale rise of Butler? Couldn't he feel that buzz of destiny pulsing through Lucas Oil Stadium? Didn't

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he know he was playing the NCAA tournament equivalent of Russian roulette?

"I thought it would take a miracle shot," he explained later.

So by now, you've likely seen the replay a thousand times. Zoubek, with a brick layer's touch, rifled his final free throw attempt off the back iron. Butler star Gordon Hayward rose for the rebound, turned to his right and took off.

He had 3.6 seconds. He dribbled four times, from the center of the lane to the right sideline at midcourt. With 0.7 seconds left, he rose off his left leg. With 0.3 seconds left he fired the shot that would have redefined college basketball magic forever.

"Felt good," Hayward said. "Looked good."

Suddenly, an arena that had been deafening all night, packed with 70,930 fans, went completely silent.

Duke's Lance Thomas swallowed hard.

"When it left his hand, I felt my heart in the pit of my stomach," he said.

Nolan Smith had his own way of coping. He was the closest defender when Hayward's shot went up, skipping past the Butler forward's right side.

"I started saying a prayer," Smith said. "I couldn't even look back at the shot. I had to look away. If it was going to go in, I didn't want to see it."

Instead, the Duke guard heard the horn then the ball hitting the backboard and the rim and then an astonished roar with the most jubilant noise coming from his left.

"I was looking at the Duke fans, that whole sea of blue," Smith said. "Once I saw all their arms go up, I knew."

Just like that, a 61-59 victory was Duke's. So was the national championship.

## A thin line

OK, so maybe it wasn't the perfect coaching move just as it wasn't a perfect season for Duke. But somehow, somehow, it all worked out. And on the final play of the season, fate twisted in the Devils' direction once more.

Does that make these Blue Devils a bit lucky? Certainly. Does it mean they aren't deserving of the

national title? Absolutely not.

What we learned Monday night and all throughout an upside down NCAA tournament is that in this big dance, elation and despair were in the mosh pit together.

If Michigan State's Korie Lucious doesn't hit a buzzer-beating 3-pointer in a second round game against Maryland, the Spartans' season would have ended on the third day of the NCAA tournament instead of at the Final Four.

If Butler's Ronald Nored didn't deliver a three-point play in the final minute of a Round 2 win over Murray State, perhaps a two-point win becomes a one-point loss and the Bulldogs' tale isn't so charming.

Heck, if No. 9 seeds Northern Iowa and Louisville had changed places in the bracket, it's not a stretch to say Kansas might have cut down the nets in Indianapolis with Duke left as the giant trying to stomach a crushing second-round loss.

Yet Duke was the only team able to navigate the tightrope from Selection Sunday to the "One Shining Moment" montage 20 days later without stumbling. And for that they deserve credit.

"We've been champions all year," Thomas said. "But to be national champions, to be the last team standing,

with all we've persevered through and all we've given each other, I'm ecstatic to be in this moment."

## Surprise party

It's incredible how perceptions can twist without warning. Twelve months ago, North Carolina destroyed Michigan State 89-72 in the national title game in Detroit, putting the exclamation point on a season that was nothing short of dominant. Duke had won 30 games itself yet was mercilessly bullied into the "So what?" club after a 77-54 Sweet 16 loss to Villanova.

On Tobacco Road, those finishes, side by side, completed a five-year run of UNC supremacy, a surge in which the Tar Heels won 157 games overall and 20 in the NCAA tournament while also collecting four ACC regular-season titles, three trips to the Final Four and two national championships.

Duke's 139 victories with only seven in the NCAA tournament just didn't measure up.

Then on Nov. 13, the top recruit in the country, a legend-in-the-making named Harrison Barnes, logged onto his Skype account on national TV and committed to North Carolina over Duke and the immediate assumption was that college basketball's most celebrated rivalry was about to become incredibly one-sided

for a long time to come.

Hey Blue Devils, get used to being very good but still not good enough.

At least that's what most of us thought.

Gerald Henderson left early for the NBA. Elliot Williams transferred to Memphis. The thought of the Blue Devils winning the 2010 national title seemed ridiculous, so much so that it really wasn't talked about with any kind of seriousness until three or four weeks ago.

"We found ways to make it work," Thomas said. "This was about a bunch of guys embracing their roles. No one plays out of character at all and that was key. Knowing what to expect from the guys on your left and right, that's championship basketball."

## Chasing destiny

Krzyzewski's fulfillment in coaching this team wouldn't have been diminished an ounce if Duke had lost to Butler. All season long, he expressed his gratification for the way his players bonded and bought in. It was a group, he said, that didn't use up emotional fuel on the road to the Final Four. Instead, their unity and dedication consistently filled the tank.

When practice began in

October, Krzyzewski assessed his squad honestly, labeling them a good team, but not great. As the season went on, he elevated them to the status of "really good."

But still not great.

"We always wanted to keep them chasing something," he said.

So when the Blue Devils returned to their locker room Monday night with all the prizes they had been chasing — two Lucas Oil stadium nets, a few boxes of championship T-shirts and hats and that brand new NCAA championship trophy — Krzyzewski finally gave in.

"You are a great team," he said.

His satisfaction was sincere.

"I hope I have a team like this again," he said.

"This was as good a group as I've ever had."

The reality of winning the national championship still seemed surreal to all the Blue Devils into the early hours of Tuesday morning.

Perhaps it's because, unlike most championship triumphs, there hadn't been those moments late in the game to let the achievement soak in. Instead, the Blue Devils were left doubting their fate even a breath or two after the final buzzer as Hayward's desperation shot sailed in slow motion.

"It would have been a miracle shot," Krzyzewski said. "But it was a tournament of miracles. I still can't believe we won."

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