

North Carolina coach Roy Williams, left, former coach Dean Smith, center, and former player Michael Jordan chat prior to the alumni game in Chapel Hill on Friday night. The alumni game, featuring North Carolina's current NBA and other professional alumni is the kickoff event celebrating the 100th year of the Tar Heel basketball program.

AP photo

# FAMILY REUNION

Carolina launches its 100th season with a star-studded, nostalgia-filled alumni game

**CHAPEL HILL** — For once, Roy Williams had a front row seat with zero coaching responsibilities. So like most of the 21,750 fans who packed into the Smith Center on Friday night, Williams settled into his chair wide-eyed and giddy.

The 100th season of North Carolina basketball has arrived. And as a nostalgic way of launching a yearlong celebration, the Tar Heels hosted their professional alumni game, magnetizing an incredibly impressive collection of playing and coaching talent back to Chapel Hill.

Williams, appropriately enough, had V.I.P. seating — at the scorer's table, flanked by the rest of the Tar Heel deities: Larry Brown next to Dean Smith next to Michael Jordan next to Bill Guthridge.

The buzz in the air seemed a little more electric.

The dozens upon dozens of banners above seemed extra crisp. The action on the floor seemed just a little livelier.

Sean May, the Most Outstanding Player of the 2005 Final Four, slipped out of pre-game lay-up lines for a moment and shook his head.

"Where else on earth could you get 22,000 people to show up on a Friday night to watch a bunch of old guys play?" he wondered aloud.

But look, these weren't just any "old" guys.

There was Shammond Williams, three times a starter at the Final Four, taking a drop pass from Ty Lawson, the 2009 ACC Player of the Year, and underhanding a lob off the backboard.

Roy Williams, a Hall of Fame coach and two-time national champion, leaned back in his seat.

"I thought, 'My gosh, Shammond's going to try to dunk it,'" Williams said. "Then I realized there was a guy named Carter flying through the air behind him."

That guy named Carter — first name Vince — did what he almost always did here, springing higher than gravity should allow, snatching the ball and turning it into a windmill slam.

At least 20,000 butts leaped from their seats.

And Carter, of course, gave Shammond Williams that mandatory UNC point of acknowledgement for the assist.

## More than a feeling

This was the kind of action you couldn't have missed Friday if you were lucky enough to score a ticket to the sold-out event.

Carter provided his trademark moments of Vinsanity.

Ed Cota and Raymond Felton — Nos. 1 and 4 on Carolina's all-time assists list — went head-to-head in the backcourt.

Danny Green drained five first-half 3-pointers on the way to a game-high 22 points as his White team prevailed 113-92.

But to truly understand what this reunion meant, to sincerely



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appreciate the tradition and the brotherhood of Carolina basketball, you had to catch a glimpse of the interaction behind the scenes.

There was Rashad McCants pulling close friend and fellow 2005 national champion Sean May aside and shaking his head.

"Sean," McCants said with a hint of homesickness, "can you believe we're going to be playing in front of a full house again?"

"I know," May said. "It's crazy."

McCants and May, like so many past Tar Heel greats, have returned to the Smith Center since their college careers ended, frequently stopping back for those legendary summer pick-up games. But not since March 6, 2005, and a certain 75-73 comeback triumph over Duke had May played on the Smith Center floor and seen that sea of Carolina blue, with appreciative fans packing the seats from hardwood to the roof.

As game time approached Friday, May felt that old surge of exhilaration.

"You lose yourself out there," he said. "The jitters were back. I was trying to keep my routine the same as when I was in college. I got out there early, got some shots up, did the same dunks I would do on game days back then. You just feel it out there. It's special."

## 'Like a kid again'

The emotions were equally powerful for Antawn Jamison, a two-time All-American and the 1998 National Player of the Year. On Thursday, Jamison buddied back up with Carter and Ademola Okulaja and took his first foray into the tradition-packed Carolina Basketball Museum.

The trio knew all about the history of the program they had played in for three years. But to see it commemorated in museum showcases provided a deeper appreciation. And to be together again — former teammates and best friends — delivered that old feeling of fulfillment.

"Like the Three Musketeers 12 or 13 years ago," Jamison said. "We did a lot of reminiscing."

More than once Friday, Jamison puffed his

cheeks and took a look around to soak it all in. This was a multi-millionaire, a two-time NBA All-Star who's living the dream life. And yet he felt himself longing for those college days again.

"You come out of that tunnel for warm-ups, see all that blue and hear the fans going crazy. Goosebumps," Jamison said. "I felt like a kid again. You never forget that feeling. Vince and I were talking, 'Man, we're so hyped right now.' It felt just like it did back in the day."

At the end of his night, as he walked off the Dean Dome court a winner once more, Jamison picked up his 2-year-old son, Antawn Jr. Strolling toward the tunnel, Jamison stopped, smiled and pointed up toward his retired jersey banner in the rafters. Antawn Jr. took a long look.

## Brotherly love

For the older guys like Jamison who have been gone from Chapel Hill for some time now, the nostalgia only seems to grow stronger each year.

"You get older, you miss it," Jamison said. "You realize how special it was when you were here. There's absolutely nothing like it. I've been playing in the NBA going now on my 12th year and nothing has even come close to listening to Coach Smith or Coach Guthridge talking to us before games. The band playing.

Guys having one common goal, to go out there and represent that Carolina jersey right."

Roy Williams understands.

"Your love for this place grows even more as you get older," he said.

Yet for the younger brothers of the fraternity, there was still a significant amount of smack talk being exchanged.

After all, Friday's game included the top six players from the Tar Heels' 2005 national title team — May, McCants, Felton, Jawad Williams, Jackie Manuel and Marvin Williams — plus four from this past season's champions: Green, Ty Lawson, Wayne Ellington and Bobby Frasor. With an injured Tyler Hansbrough sitting in the stands.

At halftime, the lights dimmed and the 2009 national championship banner was unfurled. The standing ovation grew louder.

And still, very few fans knew exactly what this meant. For the better part of four years, players from the 2005 team had lorded their legacy over their younger and less accomplished brethren.

Whenever a call dispute heated up during pick-up action, the 2005 players would roll their eyes and quickly end the disagreement.

"Get yourself a banner," May would say, "and then you can get a call."

## The great debate

Well, guess what. The 2009 team took that directive to heart. And now that they have a banner, they want more than a few calls. They want recognition as the better national championship team.

For five months now, that debate has continued to intensify. As strong as the bond of the Tar Heel brotherhood is, it also has that edge of sibling rivalry mixed in.

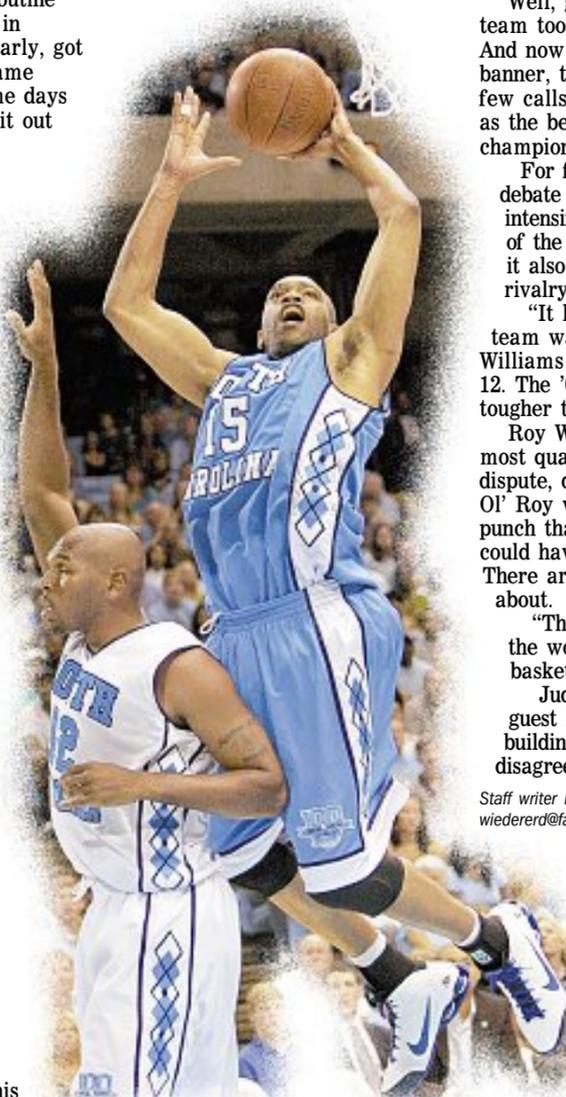
"It keeps coming up: which team was better?" Marvin Williams said. "It's us by at least 12. The '05 team was just tougher than '09."

Roy Williams, the one guy most qualified to settle such a dispute, didn't dare pick sides. Ol' Roy was simply pleased as punch that his former players could have such a disagreement. There are worse things to argue about.

"This is the best place in the world for college basketball," Williams said.

Judging by Friday night's guest list and the aura in the building, it was hard to disagree.

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Vince Carter (15) of the Orlando Magic shoots over Jerry Stackhouse during the alumni game Friday night.

AP photo

## 'WE WANT PEPPERS'

Perhaps the most antsy person inside the Smith Center on Friday night was Carolina

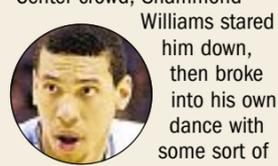


Peppers defensive end Julius Peppers, left, who played

basketball at North Carolina from 1999-2001. Peppers badly wanted to play in the alumni game. But just nine days before the Panthers' regular season opener and Peppers holding a \$16.7 million contract ... well, you do the math. Peppers went through lay-up lines before Friday's game. And when a "We want Peppers" chant broke out in the game's final minutes, he moseyed up to the scorer's table to check in. But Peppers was quickly denied by both Roy Williams and Bill Guthridge.

## JUST DANCE

Not surprisingly, just before tip-off Friday when House of Pain's "Jump Around" came blaring through the arena speakers, Danny Green, below, quickly broke into his patented juiced-up jig in front of the UNC bench. Only this time, he had competition. As Green revved up the Smith Center crowd, Shammond



Williams stared him down, then broke into his own dance with some sort of futuristic electric slide-meets-the-moonwalk boogie. "Shammond surprised me," Green said. "I didn't know he had moves like that."

## BANNER NIGHT

At halftime, the 2009 Tar Heels were honored with the unfurling of UNC's sixth national championship banner. As the banner came down, Roy Williams leaned into Danny Green and Tyler Hansbrough and whispered, "Thank you." Later, during a second half timeout, UNC revealed another new rafters addition, adding Michael Jordan's name to its Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame banner. Jordan will become the ninth Tar Heel inducted into the Hall of Fame next weekend, following in the footsteps of Ben Carnevale, Frank McGuire, Dean Smith, Billy Cunningham, Robert McAdoo, Larry Brown, James Worthy and Williams.