

MOTOWN BOUND

Tar Heels motor past Blake Griffin and the Sooners on their way to the Final Four



By Noah Trister

The Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Tyler Hansbrough deferred to his teammates — just as he'd hinted he might.

This was no one-on-one matchup down low. Instead, North Carolina rolled past Blake Griffin and Oklahoma with a total team effort.

Ty Lawson scored 19 points and top-seeded North Carolina overcame a quiet game from Hansbrough to beat the Sooners 72-60 Sunday in the South Regional final.

North Carolina (32-4) advanced to the Final Four for the second straight year and will play Villanova in the national semifinals.

"This is what we work for," the Tar Heels' Wayne Ellington said. "We put so much work in and sweat in the offseason to get not to this point, but past this point. It means a lot to be able to get to this point and have an opportunity to win the whole thing."

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Heels follow the game plan perfectly

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — If you're looking for a reel of Tyler Hansbrough highlights from Sunday's Elite Eight game at FedEx Forum, sorry. There weren't any.

Unlike last year when Hansbrough took over North Carolina's regional championship showdown with Louisville, this season's sequel was both sub-par and forgettable.

Hansbrough made his last bucket with more than 8 minutes left before halftime. And his most memorable moment came with 6:37 to play when he got into the lane and rose for a dunk over Oklahoma's Blake Griffin.

Only he was 8-feet from the basket.

At the top of his leap, Hansbrough

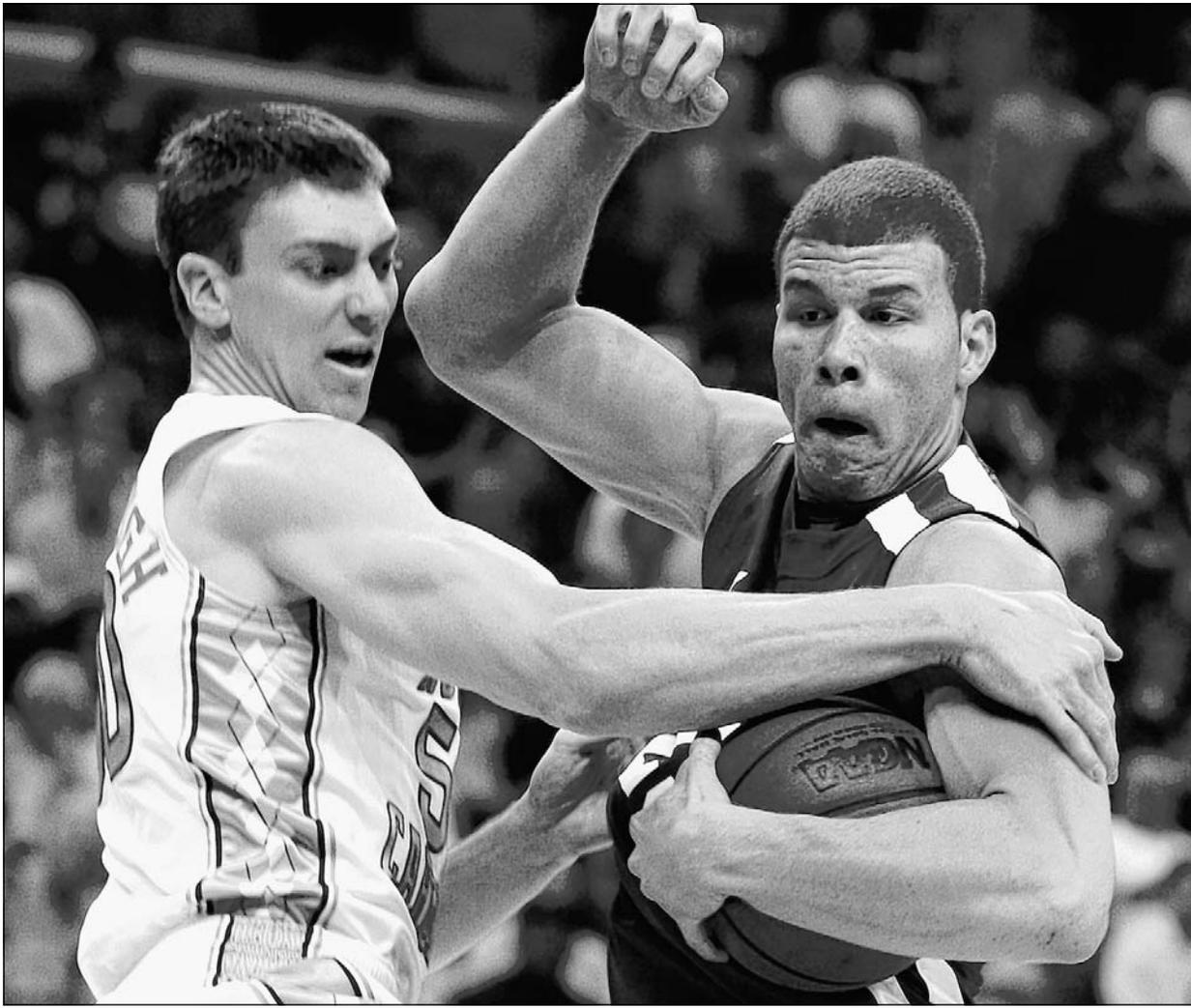
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DAN WIEDERER

AP photo

North Carolina's Ty Lawson celebrates during the second half of the Tar Heels' 72-60 win over Oklahoma. Lawson scored 19 points.



North Carolina forward Tyler Hansbrough, left, fights with Oklahoma forward Blake Griffin for the ball in the first half of the Tar Heels' 72-60 win Sunday in the South Regional final. Hansbrough only scored eight points, a season low, but it didn't matter as UNC led almost the entire game.

AP photo

Wiederer: Known for their offense, Tar Heels step up the 'D'

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could do nothing but rifle a Tim Lincecum-like fastball at the back of the rim.

"He tried to jump over a 6-10 dude from I don't know how far away," said teammate Danny Green. "I was watching the play and was like 'Whoa! Did he just try that?'"

On the bench, Tar Heels coach Roy Williams could only close his eyes and clasp both hands behind his head.

"Stupid play," Williams said. "He had brain lock trying to dunk that ball from one top of the mountain to the other top of the mountain 14 miles away."

With a Final Four berth on the line, North Carolina's leading scorer managed just four shot attempts and tallied only eight points Sunday.

Griffin, indisputably the best player in all of college basketball, outscored Hansbrough by 15 and outrebounded him by 10.

The Tar Heels' third leading scorer, Wayne Ellington, scored but nine.

As a team, Carolina only dialed its half of the scoreboard up to 72, a full 18 points below its season average.

Seems like this should be a Tar Heels eulogy doesn't it?

"If you had given me those stats before the game, I'd have thought it was going to be a tough afternoon," Williams said.

But it wasn't.

Far from it.

By night's end, the Tar Heels were headed back to Chapel Hill with two FedEx Forum nets and the

THE INSIDE STORY

The marquee matchup everyone came to see Sunday was the battle in the paint between North Carolina's Tyler Hansbrough and Oklahoma's Blake Griffin. Here's a look at how that matchup played out:

	Griffin	Hansbrough
Minutes.....	38	26
FG-FGA.....	9-12	2-4
FT-FTA.....	5-8	4-4
Points.....	23	8
Rebounds....	16	6
Steals.....	0	2
Assists.....	1	3
Blocks.....	0	0
Fouls.....	4	2

championship trophy of the South Regional packed in their carry-on luggage.

They had not only beaten second-seeded Oklahoma 72-60. They had set a defensive trap and giggled as the Sooners, like some cartoon villains, stumbled in and were quickly corralled with no escape.

Carolina led for 38 minutes and 5 seconds.

OU coach Jeff Capel explained it this way: "It came down to our inability to make shots."

Did it ever.

In the first half, the Sooners shot 36.4 percent and, for the game, missed 22 of their 24 shots from outside the lane.

"Like Coach said," Taylor Griffin echoed, "shots just weren't falling."

It's a little more complicated than that. But truthfully, not by much.

Williams, one of the most

underrated game-planners in college basketball, devised a simple yet brilliant strategy, let his superstar-laden team go to work and — Voila! — the nation's most explosive offensive team turned in a magnificent showcase of defense.

The principles were simple.

Every time Oklahoma star Blake Griffin touched the ball in the post, he was to be double-teamed. The Tar Heel guarding the Sooner who threw the entry pass was to run right at Griffin while the other three UNC players rotated around to contest Oklahoma's jump shots.

"We wanted to stop Blake Griffin and then make the rest of their guys more shooters than drivers," UNC point guard Ty Lawson said. "This was about as simple of a game-plan as we could have."

Simple but effective.

The Sooners committed 16 turnovers, missed their first 15 3-point attempts and didn't make a shot from outside the paint until 5:13 remained.

Griffin, clearly the most dominant force in college basketball, still managed 23 points and 16 rebounds.

"But it didn't look like his normal 23 and 16," said Carolina junior Deon Thompson. "I think we really made his life tougher today."

Oklahoma's 60 points were a season low, 19 off its season average. With Hansbrough and Thompson and Ed Davis and Tyler Zeller all taking turns on Griffin, the Sooners looked confused.

They looked to Griffin, looked to Griffin, looked to Griffin and when he couldn't get the ball, they grew frustrated.

With 5:38 left before halftime and the shot clock about to expire, Tony Crocker fired up a rushed 3-pointer that missed badly. On the Sooners' next possession, they never even got a shot off.

"To me," UNC senior Bobby Frasier said, "that showed everybody how good we can be defensively."

That's the splendor of this Tar Heels team. Unlike Oklahoma, they are far from a one-man show.

Hansbrough's not playing well? No worries. Lawson will deliver 19 points and eight assists while Green adds 18 points and three rebounds.

The offense isn't in overdrive? No sweat.

On Sunday, facing perhaps the most difficult defensive task of the entire season, the Tar Heels turned in perhaps their most impressive defensive performance, executing Oklahoma to death with some straightforward strategy from their coach

"I don't know that that's the best defensive performance we had all season," Thompson said. "But we definitely took what was given to us by the coaches. And I think that's probably the best we've done at taking a game plan and following through with it."

Talented. Attentive. Teachable.

That's why Carolina is headed for the Final Four for the 18th time and Williams is headed there for the fifth time since 2002.

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