

UNC, Duke teams shoot hoops for kids

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CHAPEL HILL -- After more than 57 hours of basketball, you'd think the last thing Marshall Stanton would want to do is stand.

But the UNC player who had just finished competing in the world's longest basketball game was gracious and shook hands with his many fans -- children he'd helped by playing in the three-day fundraiser.

"I couldn't feel better right now," Stanton said, packing his bags. "To see the kids we were helping out ... as much pain as we went through, it was one of the coolest things I was ever able to do."

The 24 Duke and UNC students -- and a large number of volunteers -- started their world-record basketball attempt early Saturday morning and ended Monday at 6 p.m. The Spalding Never Flat Basketball Marathon was a joint effort between the two universities and was organized through the Newman Catholic Student Center.

To earn the title of world-record holder, players had to adhere to a strict set of rules from the Guinness Book of World Records that laid out nearly every facet of the game.

The athletes were not allowed to leave the gym for more than five minutes at a time, and they couldn't play for more than four hours without a break. Teams kept up a rotation of players, with six resting at any given time.

In addition to the satisfaction of seeing their names in the Guinness book, the players also were raising money for the Hoop Dreams Basketball Academy, a local nonprofit that helps children with life-threatening illnesses by teaching them to play basketball.

During their long journey, there were moments of near-heartbreak, absurdity, humor and desperation as the dedicated players, coaches, referees and volunteers slogged their way through the hours.

Here is an (almost) hour-by-hour account of what transformed the two teams from fresh-faced college students into filthy, exhausted media darlings:

7:59 a.m. Saturday: The players practice lay-ups and maneuver among the Hoop Dreams kids when former vice presidential candidate John Edwards -- who later will help start the game by throwing up the ball for the tip-off -- arrives. The gang -- it seems -- is all here, except one notable exception. Where are the Duke players?

8:02 a.m. Saturday: Dark-blue-clad Duke players swarm into the gymnasium, yanking off street clothes and changing into sneakers. Duke player James Smyth explained their tardy arrival.

"Well, first, a couple of the coaches overslept," Smyth said. "And then [teammate] Brendan Hayes gave us the wrong directions. We were driving down I-40 and realized the exit numbers were counting down. So we turned around and started to go real fast, like 85 mph. We got pulled over by the police and given a ticket for speeding."

8:26 a.m. Saturday: Edwards tosses up the ball and UNC quickly scores the first basket. But moments later, the clock is stopped, players retreat to the sidelines. "That was just a commemorative tip-off," organizer Greg Richmond explains to the disappointed crowd as the clock is reset to zero.

When play resumes 4 minutes later, Carolina again is first on the board. Players hustle up and down the court. There are 57 hours, 59 minutes to go.

7:17 p.m. Saturday: 47 hours, 15 minutes to go. The players are sweaty and slowly make their way across the floor. The score is Duke 483, UNC 444.

10 a.m. Sunday: 32 hours, 29 minutes to go. The Duke nurse on duty, Jennifer Jacobs, reports many incidents of chafing and blisters. There also has been a black eye, a bloody nose and countless jammed fingers.

Ritch and Linda Pandullo, parents of Carolina player David Pandullo, are nearly alone in the stands. They say they have tried to be on hand for each one of their son's shifts on the court.

"It was breaking my heart. He looked so tired and exhausted," Linda said. "I thought, 'There's no way he's going to make it.' " But Ritch says he's proud of his son's drive. "Out of all the wacky things a college kid can do, this is the most noble," he said.

Score: Duke 1,674, UNC 1,535.

10:56 a.m. Sunday: 31 hours, 43 minutes to go. Two giant tubs full of water are rolled into the gym as foot baths for the players. Rickmon Logan, a UNC player, heads straight from the court to the tubs at the end of his shift.

Simultaneously soaking his feet and chowing down on a banana, Logan looks relaxed, and is joined shortly by teammate Khoa Nguyen, who washes his hair in one of the big tubs.

2:30 p.m. Sunday: 28 hours, 2 minutes to go. Organizer Richmond says there was a miscount of fouls, and officials thought one player had exceeded his six-fouls-in-two-hours limit. "We went to the tape and found the tally was inaccurate," Richmond says with a sigh of relief.

6:13 p.m. Sunday: The teams break the official world record of 33 hours, 35 minutes. The unofficial record is 52 hours. There are cheers and smiles all around -- until players realize they still have more than 24 hours to go.

8:37 a.m. Monday: 9 hours, 55 minutes to go. The players on the court look like they are wading through waist-high pudding. There are no cheerleaders, and one of the assistant scorekeepers is sleeping with her head on the table.

Referee Kevin Reavis is just waking up from a nap on the floor. Reavis has stayed in the gym for almost the entire marathon, filling in whenever other refs call in or don't show up. "I don't think there is any more worthy thing we could be doing at this point in our lives," he says, smiling.

Score: Duke 3,035, UNC 2,790.

10:28 a.m. Monday: 8 hours, 14 minutes to go. UNC basketball coach Roy Williams enters the gymnasium to much fanfare. He grabs the mic and immediately begins shouting out his play-by-play call.

"Good job, that was good defense," he says when a Carolina player blocks a Duke player's pass. "From the looks of it, you Carolina guys and girls need to get going," he encourages.

5:55 p.m. Monday: The gymnasium is full and it feels like a family reunion. Many of the volunteers have come back for the final minutes. Joining them are parents, fans and officials from both schools.

The teams on the court are showing off, full of energy. The crowd counts down the final seconds.

6 p.m. Monday: Players hug and shake hands. They raised \$60,000 for Hoop Dreams and broke the world record.

Final score: Duke 3,688, UNC 3,444.