

Pirates Rough Up Heels

Written by Kevin Best

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Shane Carden threw three touchdown passes and ran for three scores to help East Carolina beat North Carolina 55-31 on Saturday, earning its first win in Chapel Hill in nearly four decades. Vintavious Cooper ran for a career-high 186 yards for the Pirates (3-1), who had lost to the Tar Heels in each of the past four seasons -- all by at 14 points or more. Cooper added eight catches for 70 yards, powering the Pirates in a surprisingly one-sided win against an in-state rival.

East Carolina had beaten North Carolina (1-3) on the road only once before. That came in 1975, before four Pirates assistant coaches were even born.

The Pirates scored the game's first 14 points, led 35-10 early in the third quarter and never let the Tar Heels get closer than 14. ECU finished with 603 total yards, the second-highest total ever allowed by UNC at home.

For the Tar Heels, it was another head-scratching afternoon on offense. North Carolina, which managed just 62 yards in the second half of last week's loss at Georgia Tech, picked right up where it left off by failing to reach the end zone until its fifth drive.

By then Carden and Cooper had the Pirates rolling.

Carden connected with Justin Hardy for a 6-yard touchdown on the game-opening drive, then found Lance Ray for a 7-yard score on ECU's third possession to make it 14-0. He followed that by scoring on a keeper to push the lead to 21-3 with 10:05 left in the second, the first of his three 1-yard rushing scores.

He added a fourth-and-1 deep ball to Ray for a 48-yard touchdown with 3:33 left, allowing the purple- and gold-clad Pirates fans crammed into a corner section of Kenan Stadium to savor this one just a bit more. Carden came back out once more to take a knee, then walked to the sideline to hug offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley followed by fourth-year head coach Ruffin McNeill.

It was a strong bounce-back performance from Carden, who threw three interceptions and was sacked seven times by Virginia Tech's rugged defense in a 15-10 home loss two weeks ago. He threw for 376 yards, leading a no-huddle offense that ran 101 plays -- the most ever run against North Carolina.

As for Cooper, he didn't reach the end zone but was the driving force behind the Pirates' offensive success nonetheless. He cracked the 100-yard rushing mark on his first carry after halftime and finished with career-highs in yards rushing, carries (35), catches and yards receiving.

It marked East Carolina's third win ever against North Carolina and the first since beating the Tar Heels 34-31 on a last-second field goal at home in 2007. Last year, the Tar Heels shut down Carden and the Pirates offense in a 27-6 win here.

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This time, it was ECU's defense frustrating UNC quarterback Bryn Renner. The senior threw for 366 yards with three touchdowns, though the first didn't come until after Chris Hairston's 3-yard run made it 35-10 with 11:38 in the third.